

Report Title:	Update on Recommendations from the joint Children & Young People and Living In Hackney Scrutiny Commission Investigation into Housing Support for Care Leavers
Meeting for:	Children & Young People Scrutiny Commission
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Introduction

Since the Joint Scrutiny Commission in February 2021, a great deal of work has taken place between Children's Social Care and Housing colleagues to improve the housing offer to care leavers, both pre and post 21. However, during a Children's Social Care Ofsted inspection in July 2024, the key message from our care leavers once again was that access to safe, affordable housing is their number one priority. We have been particularly pleased by the impact of changes to the housing register since then, but are aware that there is still work to be done in this space. The national context is also evolving, with new government initiatives including:

- **The [new local connection rules](#) for care leavers.** This change in legislation exempts care leavers from residency criteria, whilst other conditions will remain. It is due to be implemented in 2026. We think it is likely that the impact of this will be:
 - A change to our Allocations Policy to enable care leavers from other local authorities potentially to join Hackney's housing register. They will be admitted to Band C (Hackney care leavers currently join the register on Band B, which offers them higher priority). It is very difficult to anticipate what additional demand this may place on the register and homelessness colleagues;
 - An opportunity for Hackney care leavers who do not want to secure long-term housing in Hackney e.g. because they have settled over time elsewhere, or due to safety reasons, to request access Housing Registers in other local authorities (albeit with the caveat that the supply of social housing in other areas is likely to determine how timely a response they may receive).
- As part of the **DfE Children's Schools and Wellbeing Bill**, the government has indicated that it will:

- Include a clause to disapply the intentionality test for all care leavers up to the age of 25. Once introduced, this will mean that - providing all other eligibility criteria are met - a care leaver will be owed the main housing duty regardless of whether the loss of their previous accommodation (including TA) could be attributed to a deliberate act of omission;
- Require each local authority to publish their arrangements to support care leavers in their transition to adulthood and independent living.
- Other changes that are being considered by the **Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG)** and the **DfE** include:
 - Clarifying the expectation that there should not be routine use of the homelessness system at any point for care leavers;
 - Strengthening wording linked to the suitability of accommodation, adequacy of support, and early planning.

In light of the 2024 Ofsted judgement, we feel it is likely that we will be subject to a 2 day focus visit from Ofsted in 2026, with a spotlight on care leavers, however, this is yet to take place.

	Recommendations	Update September 2024	Update January 2026	Next steps
1	<p>The Commission recommends:</p> <p>A. That additional specialist housing advice and support is commissioned to meet the housing needs of care leavers across both Corporate Parenting and Housing Needs services (in particular for care leavers seeking accommodation in the private rented sector - see recommendation 3);</p> <p>B. That Social Workers and Personal Advisers in the Corporate Parenting team and housing workers in the Housing Needs team are provided with regular updates and dedicated training to</p>	<p>A contract was jointly commissioned by CFS and the Benefits and Homeless Prevention (BHP) Service from January 2023 with voluntary sector organisation Settle to provide post tenancy support for up to 30 care leavers a year moving into independent accommodation.</p> <p>Key managers from across BHP and the Leaving Care Service continue to meet monthly and relationships across the services are strong.</p> <p>Two named Benefits and Homeless Prevention Officers dedicated young</p>	<p>The Contract with Settle has been extended to the end of 2025 and this post tenancy support is in the process of being re-tendered for another 3 years. A video of one of our care leavers, talking about the impact of Settle with Lem Sesay, can be found here.</p> <p>The 3 year Housing First Project, funded via SHAP, continues to run to April 2027. Through this project, 10 care leavers with the most complex needs are being offered a</p>	<p>Settle is commissioned to offer 1 hour a week's support to care leavers starting a tenancy over a 6 month period. This is a good level of support for most care leavers moving into permanent accommodation. However, we know that a small number would benefit from more intensive support. We are exploring possibilities for the future, including a Settle Plus</p>

	<p>maintain and improve the quality and consistency of housing advice for care leavers;</p> <p>C. That at least two housing support officers within the Greenhouse (which supports local homeless young people) are dedicated to support/ or identified as nominated leads for care leavers (to help improve consistency</p> <p>D. That in collaboration, the Corporate Parenting and Housing Needs team regularly audit the quality and timeliness of advice and assess and validate with care leavers / prospective care leavers.</p>	<p>people, including care leavers, have been in post since October 2022.</p> <p>BHP colleagues have supported training sessions for Corporate Parenting practitioners, including an all service meeting focused on the current housing context in Hackney. In April and May they delivered sessions on the changes to the housing register for care leavers.</p> <p>Regular audits of care leavers consider the quality of housing advice and information.</p> <p>Changes to the Children's Social Care database and a new data dashboard enables us to report on the housing outcomes of care leavers at 21.</p>	<p>tenancy, alongside intensive, wrap-around support from Centrepoint.</p> <p>Managers from across BHP and the Leaving Care Service continue to meet monthly to review the housing needs of individual care leavers and wider presenting issues. A dedicated housing officer that specialises in working with young people is a key source of support for this work.</p> <p>We have sought feedback from care leavers who have successfully bid for a tenancy on the impact of this on their lives, some of which is captured in this video. We are in the process of a further consultation with young people about the process of joining the register, to help ensure this process is as smooth and accessible for them as it can be.</p>	<p>offer and further work with Centrepoint.</p> <p>This month we are launching a new housing drop in - for all housing related queries - from our care leavers hub in Bocking Street. This will provide a regular opportunity for young people and Leaving Care staff to access advice and support on queries relating to homelessness and post tenancy issues. We are also planning to roll out a series of housing-related workshops for care leavers from the hub in 2026, as part of our preparation for independence work.</p> <p>Further training for all Leaving Care staff on housing policies and procedures, including changes to the local connection rules, is being organised for the coming months.</p>
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2	<p>In developing the joint housing protocol for care leavers, the Commission recommends that Corporate Parenting, Benefits and Housing Needs and Housing Strategy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Note the Care Leavers Accommodation and Support Framework developed by St Mungo's & Barnado's • Note the information and advice provided by government departments (DCLG/DfE/DLUHC) to support the development of local protocols; • Engage and involve local care leavers, other looked after children, foster carers and other stakeholders; • Develop and agree on oversight and monitoring arrangements with the Corporate Parenting Board to ensure that there is ongoing review of delivery across children's and housing services; • The protocol should be agreed and implemented by the end of financial year 2022/23 at the latest. 	<p>A Joint Protocol on care leavers housing, developed with input from the Senior Youth Homelessness Advisor from DLUHC (now Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government), was finalised in January 2023 and reflects recommendations made by Scrutiny.</p> <p>The development of our housing offer to care leavers, both before and after they turn 21, is named as a key strategic priority in our Corporate Parenting Strategy, 2023-25. Each element of the strategy is overseen by a relevant officers group. Ultimately, responsibility for overseeing progress against this strategy sits with the Corporate Parenting Board. Two new Care Leaver Advisors have sat as full time members of the Board since autumn 2023.</p>	<p>Following a series of meetings chaired by Rickardo Hyatt, Group Director of Housing, Climate and Economy and attended by key staff from Children's Services and Housing Services, the Young People Leaving Care and Housing Protocol was updated in April 2025. Updates included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The changes to the housing register from April 2024; • Support available to specific groups of care leaver e.g. those leaving custody and those who are parents; • Enhanced information about available post tenancy support; • The commitment to care leavers as a priority group in the forthcoming Housing Strategy. <p>There has been a Leaving Care Improvement Plan from September 2024. Housing is the first priority area in this plan. Progress is monitored via the Corporate Parenting Board, Chaired by Deputy Mayor Bramble, and the Children's Social Care Reform Board, Chaired by the Chief Executive.</p>	<p>Tenancy Services have undertaken a great deal of work on their approach to supporting residents with additional needs. They have consulted on this work in relation to the particular needs of care leavers.</p> <p>Further work is planned with tenancy services, following their current restructure, to strengthen the offer of post tenancy support to care leavers e.g. through the introduction of young people friendly tenancy agreements and additional post tenancy sign-up check ins. Some of these ideas are being piloted through the Housing First Project, in order to test and learn.</p>
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3	<p>The Commission recommends that additional specialist support should be commissioned to provide more help to those care leavers transitioning from supported housing into the private rented sector. To support this the Commission recommends:</p> <p>A. That further investigative work should be undertaken to assess the experiences of care leavers in the private rented sector to further understand issues around the acceptability and accessibility of tenancies and what support might be needed to help them sustain their tenancies (e.g. how well are care leavers sustaining PRS tenancies at the moment);</p> <p>B. The Council considers commissioning the The National House Project (or similar) which provides a peer support framework to assist care leavers to develop the skills, confidence and social networks to progress to independent tenancies within the PRS. This will help young people to leave supported housing earlier and live independently, if they wish to do so.</p> <p>C. Corporate Parenting and Benefits and Housing Needs should consider how additional floating support can be commissioned to help young people transitioning from supported housing to housing within the private rented sector;</p> <p>D. That the Council considers developing an accredited landlord scheme, which</p>	<p>Hackney of Tomorrow undertook a peer review on the experiences of care leavers who moved into their own tenancy, which will help us shape our offer of support going forward.</p> <p>Exploration was undertaken with Islington about their National House Project. Unfortunately, this model is dependent on social tenancies being made available for those in the project, which is not currently an option. However, in a partnership between BHP and CSC, we were successful in securing MHCLG funding for a Housing First Project. This will support 10 care leavers aged 18-25 with the most complex needs to move into social tenancies over 2024/5, with an intensive package of wrap around support.</p> <p>Hackney Council is affiliated to and financially supports the London Accredited Landlord Scheme, which provides a comprehensive framework to encourage landlords to be good, responsible landlords.</p> <p>Following the Scrutiny Committee, the Local Offer to Care Leavers was updated, to clarify that rent deposit support would be offered by CFS to</p>	<p>Sadly, the prices in the private rental sector make this an unaffordable option for most care leavers. Currently only 7% of our care leavers age 18-25 are living in private tenancies (with half of these age 23 and 24). However, the post tenancy support from Settle is available to all care leavers, regardless of the type of tenancy.</p> <p>The Council has approved a borough wide private rented sector licensing scheme for implementation in May 2026. This scheme can be used to liaise with and identify landlords who would be willing to work with care leavers.</p>	<p>An evaluation of the outcomes of the Settle Contract, alongside the Housing First Project, in April 2027, will enable us to form a clear view about the support required to achieve the best outcomes for care leavers entering longer-term tenancies of all types.</p>
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	<p>identifies those local landlords who would be willing to work with care leavers, their personal advisers and housing officers to help support them into and maintain tenancies in PRS accommodation (e.g. flexible tenancies, commitment to work with the LA to avoid eviction, reduced deposit);</p> <p>E. That the Council considers providing a deposit / rent in advance scheme (outside homeless route) and considers developing a pilot scheme in which the Council acts as a guarantor for care leavers seeking accommodation in PRS for the first 6/12 months of tenancy.</p>	<p>care leavers who wished to move into their own tenancies before the age of 21, if we agreed that this was an appropriate option for them.</p>		
4	<p>The Commission recommends that:</p> <p>A. That Council considers ways in which the social housing (Council) quota for care leavers can be increased from 18 units to a minimum of (30) units per annum;</p> <p>B. A defined set criteria should be developed to determine care leavers eligibility for permanent social housing tenancy through the council quota. The eligibility criteria should be:</p> <p>i) Developed in consultation / co-produced with looked after children/care leavers;</p> <p>ii) Underpinned by an open and transparent scoring system;</p>	<p>Having explored the various potential options to try and improve care leavers access to affordable, secure accommodation in the long-term, a decision was made that the best option was to replace the quota system with a universal offer for all care leavers to join the Housing Register between the ages of 18 and 25. This decision was endorsed by Cabinet in April 2024.</p> <p>We are in the process of supporting all care leavers who wish to do so to join the register. All applications will be backdated to their 18th birthday.</p>	<p>Following the agreement to change the remit of the Housing Register, to enable Hackney care leavers to join from 18 (and those who join later to have their bidding numbers backdated to 18), by autumn 2024 all care leavers who had indicated they wished to do so had joined the register. The impact has been considerable.</p> <p>Since October 2024, 67 care leavers have started new social housing tenancies through the bidding process, with more signing new tenancy agreements every week. This is a significant contrast to the quota system, which offered</p>	<p>We know that there is more to do to ensure that all young people understand the process of joining the housing register and what happens next. We have recently rolled out a survey to those who have successfully secured a tenancy, to seek their feedback on how the process and the information provided to them could be improved.</p> <p>Going forward, we plan to automate the process of care leavers joining the Housing Register, with the procurement and rollout of a new housing</p>

<p>iii) Clearly communicated to professionals supporting care leavers (Social Workers, Personal Advisers, Housing Support Officers and Foster Carers) and care leavers themselves (in particular details to be set out within the local offer).</p> <p>C. Housing Needs and Corporate Parenting undertake further research and modelling to assess the impact of placing all care leavers on the housing register at the age of 18, in particular:</p> <p>i) Whether this would lead to more care leavers placed within permanent social housing;</p> <p>ii) How the rights of care leavers with children or those attending university could be preserved in such a system.</p>		<p>16 x studios or 1 beds a year (often studios) and 2 x 2 beds for parents. New tenancies include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 x studios; • 58 x 1 beds; • 7 X 2 beds. <p>Between January and December 2025 the proportion of our total care leaving cohort (age 18-25) who are living in their own social tenancy has grown from 19% to 31%.</p> <p>Whilst we expect that the pace of successful bids is likely to slow over time, as some older care leavers gained considerable ground in the bidding system in 2024 by having their bidding numbers backdated, the results so far make us feel hopeful that the current system will continue to produce better outcomes for our young people than the quota system.</p> <p>Feedback from care leavers suggests that they very much appreciate the enhanced power and control they are offered over their housing future through the bidding system, whilst Leaving Care staff have been impressed by the quality of homes our young people have been able to secure.</p>	<p>case management system. This will offer care leavers more agency in this process, as at the moment they are dependent on Leaving Care practitioners to navigate this process on their behalf (as it sits outside of the mainstream registration system).</p> <p>We have agreed that we will keep the 2x 2 bed quota places for care leavers who are parents for 2025/6, as we know these tenancies can take a long time to successfully bid for. However, we do not feel we need the quota of 16 x studios or 1 beds, given the success of the changes to the housing register.</p> <p>These and other potential changes to the Lettings Policy, which may benefit care leavers, will be further explored in 2026.</p>
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5	<p>To improve the supply of housing available for care leavers the Commission recommends:</p> <p>A. In line with the actions of other boroughs regarding this issue, a full asset review is undertaken across the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account (HRA) to identify potential properties which might be reconditioned / repurposed as accommodation for care leavers. (It is noted that a number of community flats on estates, currently being used for tenant engagement, have already been identified as possible units which might be considered for repurposing.)</p> <p>B. That the newly developed Housing Strategy:</p> <p>i) Recognises and prioritises the housing needs of care leavers;</p> <p>ii) Set out the approaches the Council will take in responding to the housing needs of care leavers particularly in creating additional housing capacity and broader range of accommodation options:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Investment needed to prevent housing needs (e.g Staying Put, Supported Lodgings, Staying Close etc) 2. How the role of modular builds can increase and extending housing options for care leavers (e.g. both studios and shared accommodation); 	<p>On the HRA assets, a 20% stock condition survey has been commissioned, which is being used to determine the long term viability and investment needs of existing properties.</p> <p>A lack of unencumbered and available land in Hackney means that sourcing purpose built products in the Borough is the principal alternative to self delivery, as LBH has done in expanding the TA provision. If suitable corporately owned assets do become available, these will also be considered alongside other corporate priorities.</p> <p>A new Hackney Housing Strategy is under development. The Strategy will recognise the housing needs of Care Leavers and will look to develop and implement options as set out and recommended by the Scrutiny Panel.</p> <p>Strategic housing colleagues have undertaken some initial modelling and are looking to see how we can incorporate care leavers accommodation and housing options into a buy-back and/or street purchase scheme.</p>	<p>Care leavers have been named as a priority group in the development of Hackney's new Housing Strategy. We are particularly keen to consider alternative options for care leavers to mainstream temporary accommodation, as we know from our young people that many can find living in these settings very challenging. We have been finding out more about what works well for care leavers in other boroughs.</p> <p>We have been pleased that the changes to the housing register in 2024 have already seen numbers of care leavers (up to the age 25) living in TA significantly drop from 106 in January 2025 to 51 in December. However, we would like to work towards a future in which no Hackney care leaver under the age of 25 needs to go into mainstream TA.</p> <p>We are in the process of developing options appraisals which include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revisiting the Lettings Policy again, to consider further options to strengthen the position of care leavers; • Extending our supported accommodation pathway from 21 to 25 for our care leavers; 	<p>A new Hackney Housing Strategy is scheduled to be finalised by the end of 2026.</p> <p>The strategy will set out the action plans for implementation of those deliverable options recommended by Scrutiny.</p> <p>The key recommendation, already underway, concerns a new acquisition programme which will see both the Council and the Hackney Housing Company acquiring and purchasing properties inside (and outside) Hackney.</p> <p>We have also begun liaison with our partner Housing Associations concerning potential prioritisation and allocation of housing supply for care leavers.</p> <p>Pathway development and other more strategic considerations will be developed during the development and design phase of the new Hackney Housing Strategy in summer and autumn 2026.</p>
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	<p>3. Expansion of Peer Landlord Scheme;</p> <p>4. Utilisation of 'Live and Work Schemes' for care leavers</p> <p>iii) Sets out how local Housing Associations will be directly engaged and involved to create additional social housing capacity to meet the needs of local care leavers;</p> <p>iv) That care leavers are prioritised for opportunities within the Living Rent scheme;</p> <p>v) Set out how the role of the Hackney Housing Company can be used to create additional housing capacity and further housing options for care leavers through:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Purchase and repurposing of properties (internal and external to the borough); 2. Modular and MMC build schemes. 	<p>They will also look to amend the Hackney Housing Association Compact to incorporate the relevant recommendations and to improve partnership working and delivery for care leavers.</p> <p>Finally, should the Council decide to commission an independent review of the Hackney Housing Company, we will ensure that provision of care leaver housing forms part of the scope.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing an alternative pathway / provision to mainstream TA for care leavers. 	
6	<p>The Commission recommends that Corporate Parenting ensure:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That care leavers are actively engaged in processes to assess, monitor and review the quality of supported housing provided; • That commissioned accommodation remains affordable to allow care leavers to move on, or that there are adequate step-down arrangements to allow care leavers to transition to more independent living; 	<p>Hackney of Tomorrow and our Placements Management Unit are in the process of organising a peer review of the accommodation options within our Young People's Pathway to take place before October 2024.</p> <p>Quality Assurance visits and reports are undertaken on all commissioned supported accommodation, at least once a year, led by the Placements Management Unit. These include</p>	<p>A Youth Inspection of our supported accommodation pathways, with providers Riverside, Irish Causeway and Outward, was completed by 6 members of Hackney of Tomorrow in Summer 2025. Whilst a number of positives were identified for all 3 providers, key themes included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homes need to feel like comforting and welcoming spaces, improvements around timeliness of basic maintenance and repairs, and 	<p>Our current supported accommodation pathway for 16-21 year olds is commissioned until March 2027, with a possible extension of up to 2 years. The Children's and Education's Commissioning team have begun an evaluation of this pathway, in order to begin to scope options for the future. They are committed to engaging care</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That equally effective processes are in place to monitor and review supported housing which is commissioned in locations outside of the borough; • That wherever possible, care leavers are given a choice of available supported housing options suitable to their needs. 	<p>talking to young people living in the homes for their feedback.</p> <p>From October 2023, new rules were introduced that all supported accommodation providers that potentially house under 18s needed to be registered with Ofsted. This offers a significant new layer of oversight.</p> <p>We continue to offer care leavers a choice of accommodation, wherever possible.</p>	<p>use of garden spaces, was recommended.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good communication between staff and residents was highlighted as very important, with a recommendation to do more social activities, to help residents get to know each other. • Key work support around developing finance and independent living skills are vital - more focused and purposeful planning for the future with young people was recommended. • Ensuring young people always feel safe in the home, through good matching and relationship building with staff, was noted as essential. <p>A new rolling programme of young people's inclusion in QA of supported accommodation was agreed, including follow up visits to the homes visited in the summer to track progress against recommended actions.</p>	<p>leavers fully in this process.</p> <p>An outline Business Case for developing Council assets into supported accommodation for 16-18 year olds was also developed in Autumn 2025.</p>
7	To improve the consistency, coherence and coordination of the care leaver offer, the Commission recommends that:	Jacquie Burke, Group Director of Children and Education, represents Hackney in the ongoing discussions across London on the development	A decision was made in July 2025 to reimburse Council tax costs incurred by all Hackney care leavers aged 18-25 living out of	The plan is for Council tax support for care leavers living out of borough to continue to be part of our local offer going

	<p>A. The Council makes arrangements (either through reimbursement or reciprocal arrangements) to ensure that all care leavers are exempt from Council Tax until the age of 25, irrespective of which London borough they are placed/ accommodated within;</p> <p>B. (In the absence of a pan London agreement) The Council works with key local neighbouring boroughs with whom the majority of care leavers placed externally to the borough are located to develop reciprocal housing support arrangements for care leavers;</p> <p>C. That the Corporate Parenting Board is convened periodically (annually) to review the nature and level of the Hackney offer to care leavers (financial and all other support available).</p> <p>D. That the Mayor / Council write to London Councils and the GLA to urge them to use their influence and to lead / coordinate or facilitate work with London Boroughs for further the development of a London-wide offer for care leavers.</p>	<p>of a pan London offer to care leavers. This was launched at an event at the Guildhall in March 2024, attended by key leaders from across the capital. A priority area in this group is Council Tax exemption. The initial ask is for all London Boroughs to offer full exemption for their own care leavers living in their borough up to the age of 25, which Hackney already does. The longer-term ambition is for all London Boroughs to offer full exemption to care leavers up to the age of 25, regardless of their 'home' borough. Scoping on this continues. We had believed our energies were best spent progressing the work on the pan London offer, which has considerable momentum.</p> <p>The Corporate Parenting Board continues to meet quarterly. As noted above, improving the housing offer to care leavers is a key priority in the next 3 year Corporate Parenting Strategy as is improving the whole system local offer to care leavers more widely. Progress is reviewed at the Board and through sub groups which sit below the Board.</p>	<p>borough. To note, many care leavers are already exempt from Council tax for various reasons, for example, due to being students, or living in supported accommodation (where these costs are covered centrally). However, as of December 2025 we have paid more than £22,000 in council tax bills for those care leavers living out of borough.</p>	forward.
8	To increase awareness, knowledge and understanding of the local offer for care	Work is underway in relation to improving the overall Children and	We continue to keep our web-based local offer for care	A survey of care leavers on the future use of Bocking

	<p>leavers the Commission recommends that the Corporate Parenting (in collaboration with other services):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Establish a local offer website dedicated to the services, entitlements and support available to care leavers; i) That it incorporates not only services available through CPT, but the wider council and non-statutory services; ii) Ensure that this is designed / co-produced with care leavers and foster carers. B. Consider how a care leaver hub, with an integrated on-site offer with opportunities for peer support and networking might be provided in Hackney; C. Consider ways in which the needs of care leavers beyond the statutory age limit (25) are identified / monitored - and identify ways in which support might be provided in a sustainable way e.g. Lifelong Links or similar scheme set up in Islington Grandmentors 	<p>Education's web presence, to make it easier for Hackney children and families to understand the potential support available to them and access key information. In the interim, work has been undertaken on a google site specific to the local offer for care leavers to improve the quality and accessibility of information available to care leavers.</p> <p>Capital funding has been agreed to redevelop a Hackney asset into a Care Leavers Hub. Whilst the site identified was originally the Ann Taylor's Children's Centre caretakers home, a second - potentially more suitable - site has now been identified. Initial architect plans have been drawn up and more detailed specification work has been undertaken. The next step is to commission contractors and the hope is for the building to be open before the end of the year. Care leavers will be consulted on the details of the refurbishment and decoration. The space will be staffed by Leaving Care colleagues and multi agency professionals offering support through planned and ad hoc contact with care leavers who access it.</p>	<p>leavers up to date with any improvements made to our offer.</p> <p>In the summer of 2025 we opened our care leavers hub in Bocking Street. Our young people subsequently chose a name for the building at a BBQ in September 2025 - Sonder Space. Sonder is the realisation that every random passerby has a life as vivid and complex as your own.</p> <p>A range of events were hosted at Sonder Space to mark National Care Leavers Week, including cooking lessons, leather and drumming workshops, yoga lessons and a film night.</p>	<p>Street has been completed. Generally, young people indicated that they were most interested in practical advice and support e.g. around benefits and housing at the hub, as well as a range of social activities, to support them to come together. We already have a range of professionals who regularly attend the hub for drop in sessions, but we're continuing to expand this timetable, as well as organise new social opportunities at the hub.</p>
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		<p>Considerable work has been undertaken to set up a text messaging system for all care leavers aged 18 to 25, so we can communicate regularly with them. For example, we shared news of the new TfL discount scheme for care leavers in this way and received over 170 responses.</p> <p>A Leaving Care duty line and email address has been established and the local offer updated to communicate this is available for care leavers of all ages to get in contact with us to access advice.</p>		
9	<p>To help more children and young people to remain in family / foster carer homes under Staying Put arrangements the Commission recommends that the Corporate Parenting Team (Children and Families Service):</p> <p>A. Increase awareness, information and advice for looked after children on Staying Put arrangements as part of a wider package of housing options;</p> <p>B. Increase awareness, information and advice for local foster carers of Staying Put arrangements, particularly aiming to resolve any financial and / or administrative barriers local arrangements;</p>	<p>We continue to promote Staying Put as our preferred option for all looked after children living in foster care when they turn 18. Scope for this is reviewed through Looked After Children Reviews, the CFS monthly Preparation for Independence Panel and foster carers' annual reviews. The number of care leavers in Staying Put arrangements has increased over time.</p> <p>Work to improve our recruitment and retention offer to foster carers is ongoing and was the subject of a CYP Scrutiny Commission in October 2022. The annual Fostering</p>	<p>Staying Put continues to be the option we promote for all our young people living in foster homes prior to turning 18. As of December 2025, 28 care leavers were living in Staying Put arrangements. However, many care leavers feel at 18, or beyond, that they want to experience more independent living and so request a move on to supported accommodation. As of December 2025, 128 of our care leavers up to the age of 21 are living in supported accommodation commissioned by us.</p>	<p>It has been agreed that the Children and Families Service will work with IMPOWER and the Council's transformation team on a demand prevention project over the next 2 years, focusing on the recruitment, retention and utilisation of our in-house foster carers, in the hope of boosting this capacity.</p> <p>We are also part of the North London Fostering Consortium. We are currently exploring opportunities within</p>

	<p>C. Work with local foster carers and other stakeholders (e.g. IFAs) to encourage, develop and support a sector wide understanding that young people can (where appropriate) be able to continue to live at their fostering home / family after the age of 18.</p> <p>D. The above is accompanied by a renewed focus on the recruitment and retention of in-house foster carers to help replace those who are providing ongoing accommodation and support to Looked after children under Staying Put arrangements.</p> <p>Supported lodgings offer young people (aged 16-21) an alternative to fostering when they are unable to remain with their birth families, leaving care or at risk of homelessness. Whilst not suitable to all children leaving care, this provides a further housing and accommodation option. The Commission noted that 12 supported lodgings had been recruited since 2020 and that as of the end of January 2022, six care leavers were supported in such accommodation. In this context, the Commission recommends:</p> <p>E. Children and Families undertake a dedicated awareness and recruitment campaign to help increase the uptake of Supported Lodging as an accommodation option for care leavers.</p>	<p>Recruitment and Retention Strategy for 2024/5 has been completed. We recently took up an opportunity from DfE for a fostering diagnostic exercise and shared the outcome at the most recent Corporate Parenting Board. We had very strong feedback on the quality of our staff and carers and the assessor endorsed our plans to rebuild our internal Recruitment Team capacity. This feedback was echoed by the recent Ofsted inspection.</p> <p>We have a cohort of Supported Lodgings Hosts, however, demand for this type of accommodation has been limited at times. Most care leavers wishing to remain in a family home post 18 want to do so with their long-term carers and many are keen to move on to more independent accommodation. Positively, we have seen a number of our Supported Lodgings hosts reassessed and approved as mainstream foster carers over time.</p>	<p>We continue to have a small number of Supported Lodgings hosts. However, we have found over time that most young people either want to remain living with their own former foster carers, or move on to supported accommodation, post 18. Few are willing to consider moving into a family home setting post 18, with new carers. We therefore only have a handful of care leavers living in these types of homes at any time. We understand from our neighbours that they have had similar experiences. We have had limited success with encouraging and supporting some of our Supported Lodgings hosts to re-register as mainstream foster carers.</p>	<p>the Consortium to bid for DfE funding to support the development of a consortium Fostering Recruitment and Assessment Hub. We know from pilot projects elsewhere that this regionalised approach to recruitment can have positive outcomes. From the end of 2025, we have also had a renewed focus within the Consortium on systems to share potential fostering vacancies with one another, to maximise the opportunity for our collective children to remain living with our collective group of in-house carers. There is an agreed remuneration policy for the use of another borough's carer within the consortium, which both covers the cost of the carer's 'host' borough, and ensures that this is a more cost effective option than the alternative use of an Independent Fostering Agency carer.</p>
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10	<p>The Commission recommends a time-limited group be established led by corporate finance to identify:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Opportunities for joint commissioning with Adult Social Care (floating support) and SEND (housing support); B. How helping young people move into independent living from supported accommodation when they were ready to do so rather than at age 21 would help to remove service 'cliff edges' (e.g. opening up the social housing register, further support to PRS); C. Opportunities for an invest to save approach given that annual average cost of care leaver supported housing is £26,000. 	<p>Across the Children and Education directorate (including Health), the service is working to bring together the commissioning functions for the directorate. This is planned to be implemented later in 2024. As part of this work, an independent review of commissioning which included ASC was carried out in 2023, the recommendations from which will feed into the design of the new commissioning team.</p> <p>As outlined above, we are hopeful that the planned changes to the Housing Register will mitigate the current impact of the 'cliff edge' care leavers can experience at 21 in terms of their housing options.</p> <p>We have identified two Hackney properties that can potentially be converted into small children's homes in Hackney. We hope the capital funding to support these plans will be agreed at Cabinet in September. Having talked to a number of different local authorities, we are aware that a number of them who have opened children's homes in borough have also gone on to develop their own supported accommodation options for care leavers.</p>	<p>The Housing Strategy team has undertaken a review of the borough's need for social housing. We have consulted with them with respect to the needs of care leavers as part of this work.</p>	<p>As highlighted above, we are reviewing potential alternative models to care leavers entering TA at 21, including the option of extending a supported accommodation pathway up to 25, if this is financially viable.</p> <p>We are also reviewing opportunities to consider the repurposing of Council assets into buildings for supported accommodation for care leavers. Again, this is partially dependent on the financial viability of this option.</p>
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